

APPENDIX 1b

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CALL IN OF DECISION MADE BY CABINET 17 JANUARY 2024: 19 FEBRUARY 2024 AT 2.00 P.M.

PARKING TARIFFS, OPERATIONS & DEVELOPMENT

Called in on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group on Shropshire Council by the Group Leader

After an examination of the Cabinet report of 17th January 2024 on Parking Tariffs, Operations and Development, the Liberal Democrat Group wish to call-in the decision to increase parking charges subject to the results of the consultation.

We consider there are valid reasons why the increases in parking fees should not be raised to the levels proposed in the report and agreed by Cabinet.

Firstly, it is inappropriate that the Council is proposing major changes to car parking charges before having considered a review of its parking strategy. Surely the strategy review should come first followed by a review of charges.

In paragraph 7.18 the report argues that the changes are “minor” but the increases are very substantial as argued by Shrewsbury BID who have said that in Shrewsbury the proposed increases are “up to 67 per cent from Monday to Friday and up to 180 per cent on Sundays”.

Secondly, statements are made about car parks and on-street parking being “frequently full” with no evidence offered at 7.25 and 7.28. Does the Council not have data which it could share – we now have signage in Town indicating when car parks are full. Is that recorded? Elsewhere in the report when comparing car parking offers elsewhere very little hard evidence is reported and at one point highlighting “assumptions and other estimates” (7.78). Similarly in 7.76 “commuting motorists will feel aggrieved” Surely changes in policy should be based on survey data and not observations and assumptions.

Thirdly, the increases in car parking charges in car parks outside the river loop as compared to a flat fee for Ravens Meadow within the loop is completely at odds with the policy adopted in the Movement Strategy. On page 52 that policy is summarised as follows “Implement a graduated system of parking charges, increasing in stages as parking becomes more central”. The increase in parking charges must be called in to ensure that the charges adopted are consistent with the Movement Strategy.

Finally, the purposes of the increases are not clearly specified. The cabinet report lacks a clear explanation of why the increased charges are necessary. Money raised will tackle a backlog of maintenance but why is there a backlog of maintenance? As we understand it, the car parks have been generating a surplus over running costs. Could the use of the existing charges be better prioritised within the uses specified in Section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984?



Tuesday 23rd January 2024

Dear Leader and Chief Executive of Shropshire Council,

The Shrewsbury BID Board are deeply concerned at the unanimous decision taken at the Cabinet Meeting on January 17, 2024 to drastically increase car parking charges. This decision has sparked anger among the business community and raised serious concerns about potential lasting impacts on Shrewsbury's town centre.

While the Council has acknowledged the unpopularity of these proposals, there appears to be a significant underestimation of their potentially damaging economic and social consequences. As the county town, Shrewsbury, as well as being a vibrant economic service centre provides employment to thousands of people, it also serves as a vital communal space for a broad spectrum of the county's population.

We are unclear as to the Council's motivation for these very significant increase proposals. At the cabinet meeting it was stated that these increases are a 'necessary piece of the budget jigsaw', yet it was also repeatedly stated that these changes are not designed to balance the budget and that the increased revenue from parking will be dedicated solely to parking-related expenditures. However, the Council's own parking report seems to suggest that any surplus funds generated through changes to off-street parking can be used at the council's discretion.¹

Increasing charges to improve car park maintenance does not align with the priorities of town visitors or businesses. We very rarely hear comments about the condition of the car parks; in fact, the content of car parking-related discussions has been almost exclusively focused on the already comparably high cost of Shrewsbury's parking spaces and its negative impact on workers and visitors.

Over 750 Shrewsbury town centre businesses rely on Shropshire Council as a crucial partner to provide decent and affordable access options for their staff and customers, making the council an intrinsic part of every business's business plan. Implementing such drastic changes without any business consultation or consideration of the economic ramifications is alarming, and frankly, unacceptable.

Prior to the Cabinet's vote on January 17, Shrewsbury BID [submitted a detailed report](#) to all cabinet members highlighting the severe impacts these proposals would have on workers, students, visitors, and potentially the town centre economy at large. However, it seems these concerns of respondents have not been sufficiently considered in the decision-making process.

It would be unthinkable for any other business to increase prices for their staff and most loyal customers by up to 67%. On top of this, you are proposing to introduce new charges for all evening visitors to the town; removing the cap for long-stay visits, thus discouraging extended stays in our town; you are also proposing to introduce and increase charging on Sundays by up to 180%. During a time of high cost of living affecting businesses and residents alike, this is unfathomable.

¹ "...if a surplus is generated in meeting those objectives, there is no restriction on how off-street parking surplus income that arises is utilised. As such any surplus arising from this source can be spent at the Council's discretion." p. 9, *Parking Tariffs, Operations & Development*, published by Shropshire Council, January 2024



The Park & Ride service in Shrewsbury currently falls short as an adequate alternative due to its limited schedule and frequency, particularly outside regular working hours and on Sundays. Additionally, for those who need to commute during early morning or late evening hours, or who reside in areas not well-served by the Park & Ride routes, this option is neither practical nor reliable, thus making it an insufficient substitute for town centre parking.

Season tickets, for those who can afford the outlay, offer very limited savings on the daily rate, diminishing when a monthly or quarterly vs an annual season ticket is chosen. The price of season tickets is also increasing by up to 67%, raising the cheapest season ticket available from £480 to £800 per annum.

The strategic rationale behind these changes is also questionable, as instead of incentivising parking outside the river loop, you are implementing the highest charge increases outside the loop and the lowest increases in the town centre in fact reduces the incentive to park outside the town by narrowing the cost gap between these parking areas.

In summary, we are very concerned that the stark charge increases proposed by Shropshire Council will result in lower footfall, lower economic activity – and that the forecasted increase in parking revenues will not in fact materialise for the Council.

In response to these planned changes and the high degree of concern among our members, we are commissioning a comprehensive economic impact assessment, which we will present to the council as soon as practically possible.

We support the long-term vision of transforming movement in the town centre with much-needed improvements to park and ride, active travel, and public transport. However, any changes to access need to be implemented thoughtfully, in a managed and consultative manner. Rushing through such drastic parking changes without meaningful engagement is a direct contradiction to this approach and risks causing long-term damage to the town centre's economy and reputation.

We are once again calling on this council to align any planned increases with the rate of inflation, and urge you to reconsider your decision in light of the broader economic implications. We have requested a meeting to discuss these issues further with the Council directly as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

The Shrewsbury BID Board

Mike Matthews
Chair

Kevin Lockwood
Vice-chair

Seb Slater
Executive Director

Ann Tudor
Neil Jacques
James Handley

Darren Tomkins
Dilwyn Jones

Helen Ball
James Hitchin